

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L PALERMO 0030

E.O. 11652: GDS

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SUBJECT: CONVERSATION WITH SICILIAN REPUBLICAN LEADER

1. FOLLOWING ARE HIGHLIGHTS OF CONVERSATION WITH ON. ARISTIDE GUNNELLA (PRI), NATIONAL DEPUTY UNDERSECRETARY FOR THE PARTECIPAZIONI STATALI IN THE OUTGOING MORO GOVERNMENT, AND PALERMO PROVINCIAL SECRETARY OF THE PRI; DAVID C. LITT, AMERICAN VICE CONSUL, AND MICHELE CALDERONE, POLITICAL SPECIALIST, AMCONGEN, PALERMO.
2. SUMMARY: COMMUNIST PRESENCE IN THE POLITICAL ATMOSPHERE IS A FACT THAT MUST BE RECKONED WITH. THE UNITED STATES SHOULD MOUNT A CULTURAL OFFENSIVE IN ITALY TO REESTABLISH ITS IMAGE AS A DEMOCRATIC MODEL. THE REGIONAL POLITICAL SITUATION IS IN FLUX, WITH THE PROSPECT OF FURTHER GAINS FOR THE PCI. END SUMMARY.
3. NATIONAL GOVERNMENT CRISIS: THE SOCIALISTS WERE DISSATISFIED

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WITH THE ECONOMIC POLICY OF THE MORO-LA MALFA GOVERNMENT. THEY ARE LIKELY TO PROPOSE VERY INFLATIONARY POPULIST MEASURES, BECAUSE THEY WANT TO COMPETE WITH THE PCI FOR THE LEFT-WING VOTE. BUT ACTION IS NEEDED NOW. IN ADDITION TO THOSE COMPANIES IN DIFFICULTY MENTIONED IN THE DAILY NEWSPAPERS, THERE ARE THOUSANDS OF SMALL AND MEDIUM-SIZE
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FIRMS IN DISASTROUS CONDITIONS, WHICH NEED IMMEDIATE ECONOMIC RELIEF.

4. THE PCI'S GROWING MODERATISM AIMED AT WINNING THE SYMPATHY OF THE MIDDLE CLASS IS A SERIOUS THREAT TO THE SMALL MODERATE PARTIES. HOWEVER THERE IS NO REASON TO PANIC. THERE IS NOTHING THAT HARD WORK AND DEDICATED LEADERSHIP CANNOT OVERCOME. WE HAVE TO LEARN TO LIVE WITH THE COMMUNISTS WHO REPRESENT OVER 30 PER CENT OF THE COUNTRY'S VOTERS.

5. WHAT U.S. CAN DO TO HELP ITALY: CORRUPTION OF INDIVIDUAL POLITICIANS NO LONGER PAYS. THE U.S. CAN SPEND THE SAME MONEY TO START A CULTURAL OFFENSIVE IN ITALY WHICH IS NEEDED TO COUNTER-BALANCE THE BAD PUBLICITY THE U.S. HAS BEEN GETTING IN THE RECENT PAST. ANTI-AMERICANISM IS WIDESPREAD IN ITALY TODAY. (NOTE: GUNNELLA DID NOT REFER TO SICILY.) ITS VEHICLES ARE THE PRESS (NOT NECESSARILY COMMUNIST), THE AMERICAN COUNTER-CULTURE AND ITALY'S POLITICAL LEFT. ALL THE INFORMATION THAT ITALIANS RECEIVE ABOUT THE

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UNITED STATES IS NEGATIVE: CORRUPTION, SCANDALS, GHETTOES, POVERTY.

6. TODAY, IF A POLITICIAN HAS CONTACTS WITH AMERICANS HE IS CERTAIN THAT HIS LEFTIST FRIENDS WILL SOONER OR LATER ACCUSE HIM OF CIA CONNECTIONS. U.S. INSTIGATED RUMORS OF ALLEGED CIA INTERFERENCE IN ITALY'S POLITICS DO NOT HELP FIGHT COMMUNISM BUT WORK FOR ITS VICTORY.

AMERICAN OFFICIALS SHOULD ABSTAIN FROM HAVING OR SEEKING CONTACTS WITH ITALIAN COMMUNISTS. AFTER THE FACT DENIALS ARE COUNTER-PRODUCTIVE. AMERICA'S ANTIPATHY FOR ITALIAN COMMUNISTS SHOULD BE SO OBVIOUS THAT WHEN AN UNSOUGHT MEETING OCCURS, IT DOES NOT MAKE THE LEAST DIFFERENCE TO ITALIAN PUBLIC OPINION.

7. THE U.S. GOVERNMENT SHOULD MAKE A GREAT EFFORT TO REKINDLE THE TRADITIONAL SYMPATHY OF THE ITALIAN PEOPLE TOWARD THE U.S. AND HER DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS. THE MEANS TO ACHIEVE THIS MUST BE CULTURAL RPT CULTURAL. BEYOND TRADITIONAL UNIVERSITY CULTURAL EXCHANGE, IT WOULD IMPLY AN EXTRAORDINARY MOBILIZATION OF THE MASS MEDIA ON BOTH SIDES, THE PUBLISHING HOUSES AND THE ARTS OF THE HIGHEST CONCEIVABLE LEVEL. THE ITALIANS MUST AGAIN BELIEVE THAT THE UNITED STATES IS A BENEVOLENT, HEALTHY, DEMOCRATIC COUNTRY, WHOSE FRIENDSHIP IS DESIRABLE

AND JUST.

8. PALERMO'S COMMUNAL CRISIS: THE INTERNAL DISSIDENCE WITHIN THE DC
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ON THE ONE HAND AMPLIFIES THE MODEST VOTING POWER OF THE PCI (WHICH CONTROLS ONLY 18 PER CENT OF THE COMMUNAL VOTE), AND ON THE OTHER PREVENTS THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A STABLE GIUNTA. ALREADY THE PSDI RPT PSDI THREATENS TO DESTABILIZE THE GIUNTA OVER CHEAP POLITICAL DEMANDS.

THE PARTIES HAVE POSTPONED DECISIONS FOR A WEEK IN THE HOPE THAT COMMON SENSE WILL PREVAIL.

9. REGIONAL ELECTIONS IN SICILY: THE PCI INCREASED ONLY 1.5 PER CENT IN SICILY IN THE PROVINCIAL ELECTIONS OF JUNE 15, 1975. IT CAN BE PREDICTED HOWEVER THAT A MAJOR COMMUNIST UPSWING WILL TAKE PLACE IN SICILY AT THE NEXT OCCASION (JUNE 1976). THE VOTE OF THE YOUNG PEOPLE WILL MAKE A GREAT CONTRIBUTION TO THE LEFT.

10. CONSIDERING THAT THE CENTER-LEFT COALITION HAS ONLY A THREE-VOTE MARGIN AT THE REGIONAL ASSEMBLY, ONE CAN FORESEE THAT COMMUNIST INFLUENCE WILL BE GREATER AFTER THE REGIONAL ELECTIONS.
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